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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that the overwhelming majority of preservice teacher education programs in the United States do not offer significant instruction in the methodology of teaching character, morals, values, and virtue. Consequently, upon graduation these beginning teachers are ill-equipped to deal with the complex social and behavioral problems that face them in today's classrooms. Future teachers need to be specifically taught how to meet the overriding goals of education: to make students both intellectually smart and morally good. The first section of the paper discusses the need for a character education curriculum, focusing on: the history of moral education; the philosophy of moral education; developmental theories regarding character education; the implications of sociological trends; and transmission of moral education. The second section focuses on foundational issues of character education, noting the benefits of integrating character education into the classroom. The third section discusses inservice character education programs. A final section discusses the two primary goals of education (helping students become intellectually smart and morally good). (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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# CHARACTER EDUCATION:

# THE MISSING INGREDIENT OF

# PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Presented at the 52nd Annual Meeting of
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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**Character Education:**
**The Missing Ingredient of Preservice Teacher Education Programs**

**Abstract**

Recent research indicates that the overwhelming majority of preservice teacher education programs in the United States do not offer significant instruction in the methodology of teaching character, morals, values, and virtue. Consequently, upon graduation these beginning teachers are ill-equipped to deal with the complex social and behavioral problems that face them in today's classroom. Future teachers need to be specifically taught how to meet the two overriding goals of education--to make students both intellectually smart and morally good. Neither goal can be overlooked.

## Character Education:
## The Missing Ingredient of Preservice Teacher Education Programs

Preservice teachers complete the prescribed curriculum of their teacher education programs, receive their bachelor's degree in education and a teaching certificate, and then enter the world of the classroom the following fall as a full-time teacher, generally ill-equipped to deal with the complex problems (social and behavioral) of today's diversified students.

In a doctoral study conducted by Wakefield (1996), it was reported that the average pre-service teacher education program claims that it offers significant instruction in the methodology of teaching character, morals, values, and virtue in its curriculum; statistics indicate that this is not the case. Surveys were mailed to 1400 chairpersons of teacher education programs; only seven percent responded; less than half of the respondents indicated that moral education methods were being directly taught to their students. And yet according to the 1993 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, more than 90% of the participants supported the public school teaching of such values as honesty, democracy, acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds, patriotism, caring for friends and family members, and moral courage. The 1996 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll reported that 86% of the participants considered it "very important" that public schools "prepare students to be responsible citizens" (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996).

Teacher education programs need to present the many issues addressed by character education in order to better prepare their preservice teachers for the complex social and behavioral problems they will be facing in their classrooms. These problems include students who come from troubled families with poor parenting skills, resulting in young people who often don't know right from wrong--described as ethical illiteracy. Cheating in the classroom is on the rampage with students seeing nothing "wrong" with that practice. They demand their rights, not understanding that rights need to be balanced with responsibility for one's actions. They focus on self-gratification and self-fulfillment; self-denial and self-sacrifice are unknown virtues. Statistics show that violence, vandalism, stealing, cheating, disrespect for authority, racism, uncivil language, sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, and drug abuse are all on the rise (Lickona, 1991; many other references). Each of these issues needs to be addressed somewhere in the teacher education program's curriculum. Otherwise, the graduating preservice teachers will be ill-equipped to successfully cope with these types of problems that are increasing percentage-wise each year.

### Instructional Strategies: A Character Education Curriculum

Just as intentional instruction is required for teaching subjects such as language arts, mathematics and art, this paper suggests that similar intentional instruction is needed for the teaching of the many aspects of character education in order that

students develop those positive qualities that are foundational for responsible citizenship.

Whether the character education curriculum is a self-standing two-credit course, offered by this writer as a graduate-level course, or is integrated into specifically designated required education courses, the essential consideration is that difficult issues are presented in order to equip the preservice teachers with successful instructional strategies.

**Past History of Moral Education**

Preservice teachers need to study the past history of moral education in the public schools in order to understand the major changes that have occurred and continue to occur. For example, during the first half of the nineteenth century, liberal arts colleges directed a major proportion of their core curriculum into courses on ethics and values, including a required culminating capstone course in moral philosophy, usually taught by the college president. Their mission was to graduate students who were not only wiser intellectually but also keenly aware of their moral and ethical responsibilities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

During the past fifty years, moral education in the public schools has changed radically. In the forties and fifties, schools were expected to reflect the best values of their communities. In the sixties and seventies, a new anti-authority spirit invaded the schools which weakened the influence of the teachers who believed they had no right to express their views of what was right and what was wrong (Ryan, 1986). The eighties and nineties are indicating a change back to the fundamentals of character education including the emphasis on citizenship, service learning, and conflict resolution.

**Philosophy of Moral Education**

Preservice teachers need to become aware of the different philosophical viewpoints of moral education. For example, Aristotle stated that man becomes virtuous (kind; brave) by performing virtuous (kind, brave) acts (Ryan, 1986). He further believed that people do not naturally grow up to be morally excellent or practically wise but, if at all, only as a result of lifelong personal and community effort (Lickona, 1991).

**Developmental Theories**

Foundational to a character education curriculum is the inclusion of the developmental stage theories, especially Piaget's and Kohlberg's. Preservice teachers need to know what they can expect of their students' cognitive and moral reasoning capabilities which are dependent upon both age and developmental factors (Piaget, 1948; Kohlberg, 1981).

Research indicates that the moral developmental level of both preservice and

inservice teachers compares unfavorably with the level of college students in other fields. Also, most teachers are able to recognize but not reproduce Kohlberg's higher stages of moral reasoning (Rest, 1994). This indicates that they are not well-prepared in making mature moral decisions even though teaching is recognized as moral by nature.

Research has been assessing the effect of different types of moral education programs on college students' moral judgment. One of the more effective programs in increasing the students' higher levels of moral reasoning has been moral dilemma discussions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This indicates that preservice teachers will benefit if the curriculum includes using moral dilemmas as a teaching strategy.

**Sociological Trends**

Today's preservice teachers need to study and understand the implications of the sociological trends that are mirrored by the diversified students that occupy their classrooms. Included are the erosion and disarray of the family, the lessening influence of "religion," child abuse, the impact of television which glamorizes violence, immoral activities, and materialism, and finally poverty and homeless issues.

**Transmission of Moral Education**

The inclusion of character education in preservice education programs is important for another reason. Research has shown that teachers influence the moral behavior of their students in at least three ways: through the judgment calls they make daily in the classroom involving moral issues, by transmitting the values upheld by society, and as moral role models with parents expecting teachers to behave ethically in the classroom (Sirotnik, 1990).

**Foundational Issues of Character Education**

Foundational issues in a character education curriculum need to include the following: (1) Determining one's own value system; (2) Testing the worth of a value; (3) How to make wise choices; (4) Weighing rights versus responsibilities; (5) Emphasis on respect and responsibility; (6) Experience with service learning; (7) Learning to practice tolerance; (8) Weaving character education into the curriculum; and (9) Class meetings/conflict resolution (Glenn & Nelson, 1989; Lickona, 1991; Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 1993). Inservice teachers need to prepare and present practical projects/activities that deal with these issues.

**Benefits of Integrating Character Education in the Classroom**

Teachers spend an inordinate amount of time in class keeping their students on-task and working cooperatively. If teachers are taught the skills (listed in the previous section) which they, in turn, can teach their own students, many of the classroom

students' social and behavioral problems will be lessened or even eliminated. This will allow the teacher and students to experience more "teaching-learning" time in a positive, cooperative-type of classroom atmosphere.

### Inservice Character Education Programs

Fortunately, many character education programs developed by national character education programs are available for public schools to integrate into their curriculum. In addition, many school districts and individual schools are developing their own character education programs and conducting workshops for their inservice teachers who need specialized coping skills to deal with today's "difficult" students and issues. In 1991, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) reported that moral education programs were part of the curriculum in over 10,000 schools; this figure continues to increase dramatically. However, this does not excuse the teacher education programs from their responsibility. They should be leading in this area, not leaving it up to the public school sector.

### Conclusion: The Two Primary Goals of Education

Recent research indicates that the great majority of preservice teacher education programs in the United States do not offer significant instruction in the methodology of teaching character, morals, values, and personal ethics. The issues and curriculum described in this paper suggest the importance and practical ways of effectively integrating character education into teacher education programs.

The two overriding goals of education are to help students become intellectually smart and morally good. Neither goal can be neglected. Theodore Roosevelt said:

> *To educate a person in mind and not in morals*
> *is to educate a menace to society.*

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French philosopher, following his visit to the United States in the early 1800's said:

> *America is great because she is good, but if America ever*
> *ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.*

The molding of the future generation into moral and responsible citizens is of utmost importance. Preservice teachers need to be prepared for this responsibility.

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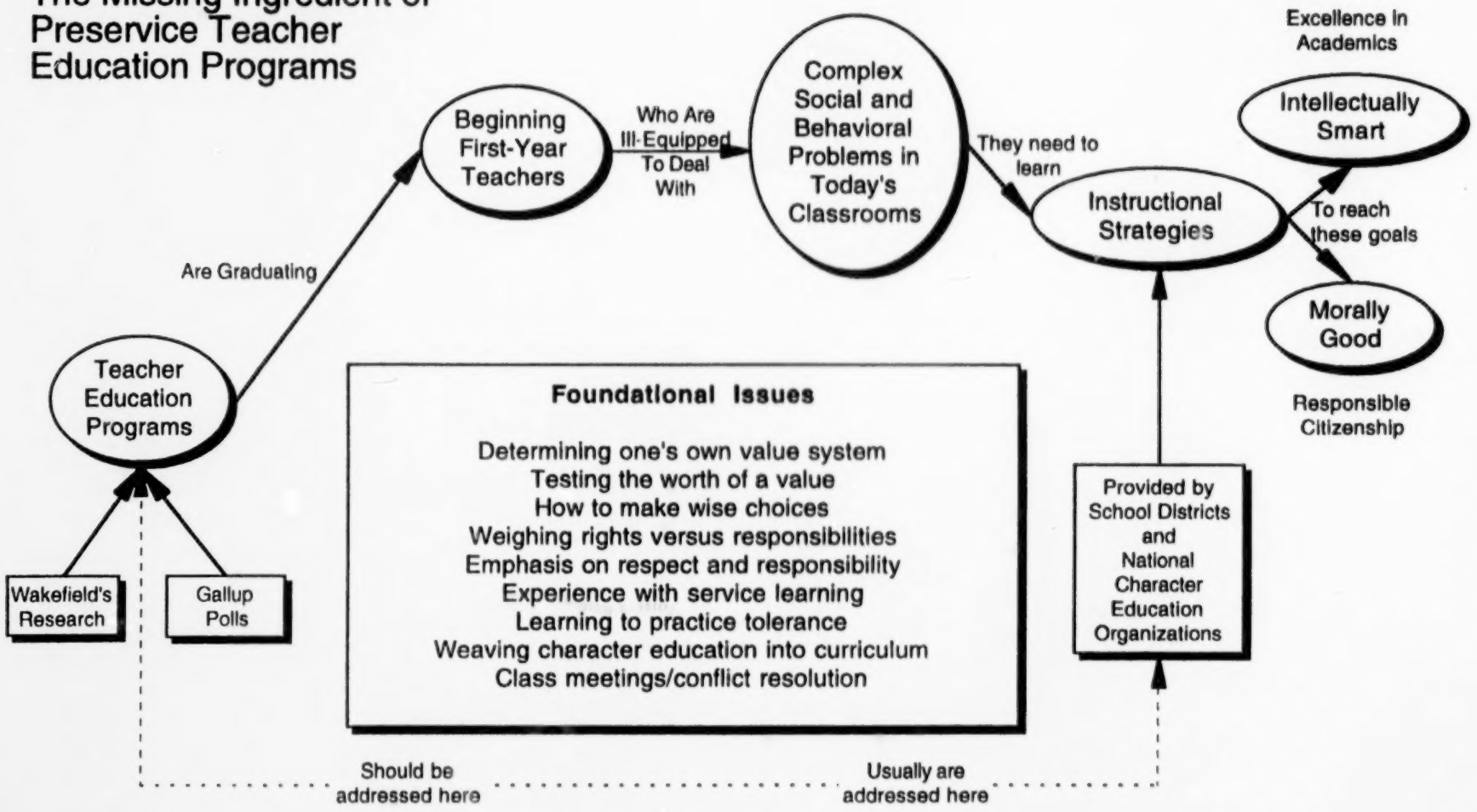






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## QUOTATIONS

To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.

Theodore Roosevelt

Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.

H. G. Wells
The Outline of History

Virtue, then, is of two kinds, intellectual and moral.

> Intellectual virtue springs from and grows from teaching, and therefore needs experience and time.
>
> Moral virtues come from habit. . .Whatever we learn to do, we learn by actually doing it...by doing just acts we come to be just; by doing self-controlled acts, we come to be self-controlled; and by doing brave acts, we become brave. . .

Aristotle
Nicomachean Ethics

America is great because she is good, but if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

Alexis de Tocqueville
French philosopher, 1800's

Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. Nothing is more important for the public wealth than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue.

Benjamin Franklin